

Table 1. Counts and estimates of raptors crossing the Channel of Sicily in the central Mediterranean area during three decades.

	THIOLLAY'S ESTIMATES 1970s ^a	STRAIT OF MESSINA COUNTS 1986–90 (MIN–MAX) ^b	STRAIT OF MESSINA COUNTS 1996–2000 (MIN–MAX) ^c
European Honey-buzzard (<i>Pernis apivorus</i>)	>16.000	6.032–8.516	16.700–27.297
Black Kite (<i>Milvus migrans</i>)	>15.000	155–397	546–1.008
Western Marsh Harrier (<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>)	>700	125–978	1.621–3.074
Montagu's Harrier (<i>C. pygargus</i>)	>220	5–273	155–866
Pallid Harrier (<i>C. macrourus</i>)	>50	4–15	25–83
Montagu's/Pallid Harrier (<i>C. pygargus</i> × <i>macrourus</i>)	—	0–29	33–159
Northern Harrier (<i>C. cyaneus</i>)	>15	11–59	3–84
Common Buzzard (<i>Buteo buteo</i>)	>2.800	15–42	30–103
Long-legged Buzzard (<i>B. rufinus</i>)	>200	0–4	6–12
Short-toed Eagle (<i>Circetus gallicus</i>)	>400	0–3	1–4
Egyptian Vulture (<i>Neophron percnopterus</i>)	>620	4–8	3–12
Booted Eagle (<i>Hieraaetus pennatus</i>)	>450	5–22	5–19
Lesser Spotted Eagle (<i>Aquila pomarina</i>)	>150	0–5	0–4
Eurasian Sparrowhawk (<i>Accipiter nisus</i>)	>70	0–7	2–14
Osprey (<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>)	>20	2–20	10–25

^a Thiollay (1975, *Nos Oiseaux* 33: 109–121; 1977, *Alauda* 43: 115–121).

^b Giordano (1991, *Birds Prey Bull.* 4:239–249).

^c Corso (2001, *Br. Birds* 94: 196–202).

Lees and Christie (2001, *Raptors of the world*, Helm Edition, London): “Italian population (380–415 pairs) presumably crosses by Sicilian Channel to and from Tunisia’s Cap Bon, whence total of ca. 200 travelled northward on spring migration during 2–18 May 1975.” However, recent studies in Italy showed that nearly all the Italian population of this species crosses the Mediterranean Sea at the Strait of Gibraltar (14 km wide), with hundreds of birds breeding in central Italy using a circuitous migratory route both during spring and autumn migration (Agostini et al. 2002a, *J. Raptor Res.* 36:111–114; Agostini et al. 2002b, *Ardeola* 49:287–291; Agostini et al. 2004, *Avocetta* 28:37–40; Baghino 2003, *Avocetta* 27:67; Premuda 2004, *Riv. Ital. Ornitol.* 74:119–124). The number recorded at Cap Bon by Thiollay during the first half of May was relatively late for the spring migration of this species (Cramp and Simmons 1980, *The birds of the western Palearctic*, Vol. 2, Oxford Univ. Press, Oxford, U.K.). I suggest that perhaps the relatively large number of Short-toed Eagles reported by Thiollay was the result of recounting immature birds in northern Tunisia. In agreement with this conclusion, recent observations by some colleagues and I made over Marettimo showed a late autumn passage of juvenile Short-toed Eagles across the Sicilian Channel (Agostini et al. 2004, *Avocetta* 28:37–40).

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GROUND NESTING BY EGYPTIAN VULTURES (*NEOPHRON PERCNOPTERUS*) IN THE CANARY ISLANDS

Ground nesting is a relatively rare occurrence in raptors, except for areas lacking any elevated nesting substrates (e.g., tundra habitats), or islands devoid of mammalian predators (Newton 1979, *Population ecology of raptors*, Buteo Books, Vermillion, SD U.S.A.). Moreover, this behavior has not been described for large diurnal raptors with long

breeding cycles that typically breed in protected cavities of cliffs, a trait presumably favored because it provided security against adverse weather.

The Egyptian Vulture (*Neophron percnopterus*) is a medium-sized scavenger living mainly in open landscapes of arid and rugged regions of Eurasia and Africa. Although strongly migratory, this species also includes sedentary populations on several archipelagos such as the Balearic Islands, Cape Verde, Canary Islands, and Socotra. Breeding takes place in cavities or caves of cliffs of variable height and nests are usually reused year after year. Occasionally, alternative sites are occupied within the same territory (Cramp and Simmons 1980, *The birds of the western Palearctic*, Vol. 2, Oxford Univ. Press, Oxford, U.K.).

Egyptian Vultures have been extensively studied in Spain since the late 1970s. More than 1000 breeding attempts have been monitored. Most of them were in inaccessible nesting places, with only a few (<5%) in caves with easy access to large mammals, including humans. No nest was located directly on the ground (Donazar and Ceballos 1988, *Ardeola* 35:3–14). In this paper, we describe the first recorded case of ground nesting in Canarian Egyptian Vultures (*Neophron percnopterus majorensis*).

Fuerteventura (1662 km²) is the most eastern island of the Canary archipelago. It is relatively flat with a dry climate (<100 mm rain annually; Donazar et al. 2002, *J. Raptor Res.* 36:17–23). The island harbors the last population of an endangered endemic subspecies of the Egyptian Vulture, with no more than 130 individuals and 25 breeding pairs (Donazar et al. 2002, *Biol. Conserv.* 107:89–97).

Twenty, 23, 21, 25, and 27 breeding territories have been monitored in 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, and 2002, respectively. On 29 March 2002, we visited the breeding territory of one of these pairs, which had bred successfully in a cave on a hillside between 1998–2001. The old nest, easily accessible by foot, was unoccupied, but ca. 600 m away, we discovered an adult Egyptian Vulture incubating an egg on the ground. The new nest site was placed on a flat and exposed surface, with scattered shrubs (*Launaea arborescens*). On 13 July 2002, we visited the nest to mark and measure the chick, which fledged successfully at the beginning of August. In 2003, the pair moved back to the cave it used in previous years and bred successfully there.

Nesting in accessible caves is common for this species in Fuerteventura (in 2002, 41% of the nest sites were accessible by foot, $N = 27$), although inaccessible sites are not a limiting factor on the island (pers. observ.). Terrestrial predators were not existent on the island until the human colonization, 2500 yr ago. Currently, the only carnivores present are feral dogs and cats, in very low numbers. In addition, the dry climate may favor open nesting. Furthermore, human density has been always extremely low (1000–3000 habitants before the European colonization; Cabrera 1996, *La prehistoria de Fuerteventura: un modelo insular de adaptación*, Servicio de Publicaciones del Cabildo Insular de Fuerteventura, Puerto del Rosario, Islas Canarias). However, during the last several decades the human population in the island has increased sharply (11 668 in 1900, 69 260 in 2000; Anonymous 2001, *Anuario estadístico de Fuerteventura*, Cabildo Insular de Fuerteventura, Puerto del Rosario, Islas Canarias), around a million tourists visit the island every year, and the number of pets has presumably increased too. These factors may lead to the loss of a number of nesting territories accessible to potential predators and, consequently, have a negative affect on this endangered population.

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FIRST SUMMER RECORDS OF OSPREYS (*PANDION HALIAETUS*) ALONG THE COAST OF OAXACA, MEXICO

Between October 2000 and September 2001, we conducted 10 trips by sea, once during almost every month, to survey Ospreys (*Pandion haliaetus*) in Oaxaca, Mexico. Ospreys breed in temperate North America and along the coast of the Gulf of California (Henny and Anderson 1979, *Bull. So. Calif. Acad. Sci.*, 78:89–106; Judge 1983, *Wilson*